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FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF ENGLISH TEACHING^{*}

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The recent organization of a National Council of Teachers of English in accordance with a resolution of the English Round Table of the National Education Association, and the founding of an English Journal devoted to the discussion of the English work of the schools, may be noted as pleasing signs of the times. There seems to be a general feeling that the English course is in a chaotic condition, and that something ought to be done about it. Especially is this true of the upper grammar grades and the high school. Most teachers are dissatisfied with the results of their own work, and those who have charge of the higher classes are sure that the work below them is weak. Even the courses that are, beyond doubt, bringing good results show little uniformity in material or method. What is traditional in the present course belongs to a time when the aim of the schools was to prepare the pupils for college. What is new is frequently but a blind attempt to meet the demands of changed conditions not thoroughly understood. And, in cases where individual schools have worked out effective methods, there has been no adequate means of making the results quickly known to other schools. Any attempt, therefore, to effect a national organization of English teachers, to spread the results of the best thought about methods in English, and to do some constructive work with reference to the English course will surely meet with hearty response.

However, no council of teachers can hope to make useful suggestions for bettering the teaching of English without knowledge of the conditions affecting it at present. No such council could be entirely ignorant of those conditions, but it seems highly desirable, if not altogether indispensable, to have at hand as a

^{*} Read before the National Council of Teachers of English, Chicago, December 1, 1911.

basis for constructive work a large body of data not now available. The facts and conclusions presented by a committee of investigation appointed by the Modern Language Association, of which Professor Edwin M. Hopkins is chairman, are very valuable and need careful attention.¹ In connection with the findings of that committee, it may be interesting to glance at some figures I have collected from the reports of 112 high schools. These figures show the number of pupils per teacher in the various subjects, and have to do with over 650 teachers and nearly 25,000 pupils.

TABLE I

Number of pupils per teacher in science	75
“ “ “ “ “ “ Latin	83
“ “ “ “ “ “ history	107
“ “ “ “ “ “ mathematics	129
“ “ “ “ “ “ English	136

These figures are somewhat inaccurate for mathematics and science. Some of the classes reported in these subjects are half-year classes, and there is duplication of enrolment. The enrolment in the mathematics classes totals several hundred more than the entire enrolment of the schools. But it has been impossible to tell just how many pupils are affected, so I have let the figures stand.

These purely external and physical facts affecting the efficiency of the course cannot be neglected. But, in addition, it is desirable to know the training of the teachers who are to put the course into operation; the equipment of the schools for English—libraries, charts, maps, magazines, lanterns, etc.; and the relative support accorded in various departments. It would be futile to attempt to reconstruct the work in English without taking into consideration the attitude of the executive officers of the schools and the support they may be expected to give. While it is true that the English teachers must be largely responsible for the building of the English course, yet it is equally true that the best English course will result in that school in which the various elements of the curriculum are carefully considered by the executive officer, and each is accorded the support its importance demands. And, if it is thought desirable to ask for added equipment, such request must be based

¹ See p. 1.

upon a clear statement of the conditions as they are, accompanied by a just evaluation of the various departments.

As stated above, the facts that would seem to be a necessary basis for constructive suggestion are not now available. I have examined the elaborate statistical reports published in several states by the departments of public instruction and, with one exception, it has been impossible to get any of the facts desired. I present the available statistics from a limited number of schools with the hope that it may soon be possible to get similar statistics from a much larger group.

The statistics presented in Table II are from 119 high schools whose pupils are admitted to the Freshman classes of the universities and colleges upon certificates of graduation. These schools range in enrolment from one hundred, sometimes less, to over one thousand. The figures given are for the three departments for

TABLE II

	Chemistry	All Sciences	History	English
Number of pupils enrolled in..	2,148	12,985	15,474	25,066
Value of the equipment for....	\$56,747	\$204,321	\$26,230	\$32,100
Value of equipment per pupil..	26.41	15.81	1.69	1.28

Spent per pupil for science equipment in 1910	\$1.42
“ “ “ “ English “ “ “	0.17

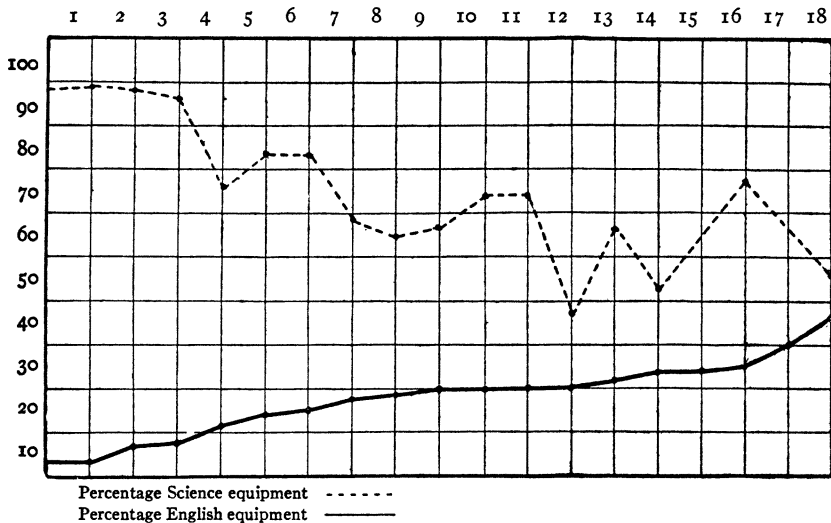
	Percentage
Of the total enrolment for the three departments, English pupils are.....	46.8
Of total equipment, that for English is.....	12.2
Of total enrolment, history pupils are.....	29.0
Of total equipment, that for history is.....	10.0
Of total enrolment, science pupils are.....	24.2
Of total equipment, that for science is.....	77.8
Of total enrolment, chemistry pupils are.....	4.0
Of total equipment, that for chemistry is.....	21.6

which the value of equipment is given—science, history, and English. The value of the equipment for chemistry is given merely because that subject shows the largest expenditure per pupil, as English shows the smallest. It would be interesting in another connection to present a statement of the comparative equipment for the various sciences, ranging as it does from \$26.41 per pupil studying chemistry to almost nothing per pupil studying

hygiene, personal and civic! But such a statement is not pertinent here and is omitted for the sake of simplicity.

Table II necessarily presents the results in the form of averages. Even more interesting than the averages is the radiation from the mean shown by some of the schools. The accompanying Chart I presents graphically the percentage of the total value of the school equipment, library and laboratory, given to science and to English in a number of small schools selected at random from the list used for Table II.

CHART I.—Percentage of the total equipment given for the teaching of English and of the sciences in eighteen schools chosen at random out of the list used for Table II.



A glance at Table II and Chart I is sufficient to show that the apportionment of funds has not been made on the basis of enrolment in the various departments. Nor do I think it has been made upon any conscious evaluation of their work and needs. It is not my purpose to discuss these relative needs, but merely to say that the present distribution seems unjust. These tables show that the evident inadequacy of the English equipment in many schools is due not so much to lack of funds as to an unjust apportionment. Whether or not my opinion of the relative needs of the departments

is correct, it would seem impossible to distribute the funds equitably without a knowledge of the facts as they are. And it seems evident that the readjustment of the English course, if readjustment be desirable, must come after these facts are known.

I have said that I do not think that the present distribution of funds is the result of any conscious evaluation of the departments and their needs. The opinion is based, in part, on the very great surprise expressed by many principals and superintendents when their attention has been called to these or similar facts.

There are at least two causes for the present condition which are very interesting. In the first place, in many small schools the superintendents or principals spend part of their time teaching. In 135 such schools, 17 teach English; 15, Latin; 21, history; 46, mathematics; 56, science. In some cases the principal teaches two subjects, usually science and mathematics. These figures indicate that, in a very large number of schools, the positions carrying the largest salaries, the most authority, and, presumably, drawing the best equipped men, are the positions in science and mathematics. It naturally follows that, when there is money to spend, the needs of the science department are uppermost in the minds of the men who are to make the apportionment.

A second cause for the present distribution comes home to the English teachers themselves. Superintendents of town schools frequently say that they do not know English work and that they leave the equipment to their English teachers, who merely put in a request for "books for the library." And it has frequently come under my observation that the two or three hundred dollars appropriated for laboratory equipment has been spent immediately and to good advantage, while the fifty dollars generously set apart for the library has rested like an incubus on the teacher until it has been spent for books which, possibly, have no relation to the needs of the pupils in the classes.

The committee of the Modern Language Association, referred to above, has made conclusive statement of the fact that the present teaching force is not adequate to the efficient training of the pupils now studying English. The inadequacy of the general physical equipment in the form of libraries, exercise material, facilities for

duplication, lanterns, etc., cannot be shown by statistics or by graphs. It follows that there is great need that some competent and influential body of teachers carefully evaluate the various elements which enter into the work of the English department, show the equipment necessary for the best results, and urge the necessity for getting it. If the aim of the teacher of literature is to make a close study of the chief poems of some of the great poets, he will not demand the same equipment as the teacher whose aim is to present something of the growth of the social, political, religious, and moral ideals of the nation. If the composition teacher merely calls for themes, marks them, and returns them to the pupils for correction, his equipment will be paper and pen. But if his method includes some form of laboratory work, he will require a great deal of exercise material, and means for rapid duplication.

If, after such a study of methods and statement of equipment, it is found that the present provision for English teaching is inadequate, then a statement of the comparative equipment for the various departments of the schools of the entire country, such as I have made for a few schools, will be necessary.

These statistics should be collected through the state departments, or through the high-school inspectors of the various universities. A multiplication of committees sending out questionnaires is to be avoided. Figures from the small percentage of schools which reply are frequently unreliable, and the schools which would make a poor showing do not reply at all. The valuation of the equipment of the schools should be made by men trained for that work, so that uniformity of reports may result. The elaborate statistics published give much valuable information, but they do not give reports in such shape that school administrators may make comparison of the work of the various departments of the high schools. I would suggest that the National Council of Teachers of English appoint a committee to decide upon just what facts are desirable, and that then an effort be made to secure the co-operation of the proper officers in gathering them.